

FISH & WILDLIFE COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: June 11, 2015

Agenda Item: Tendoy Bighorn Sheep Licenses (conditional on approval of the EA)

Division: Wildlife

Action Needed: Proposed

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 10 minutes

Background

A related item on this meeting's agenda speaks to the proposed depopulation and restocking of the Tendoy Mountains (Hunting District 315) bighorn sheep herd. With this item, FWP asks the Commission to approve for public comment the issuing of over-the-counter either-sex bighorn sheep licenses for hunting district 315, the Tendoy Mountains, to begin the depopulation phase of the depopulation/restocking project in the fall of 2015. Licenses would be available for purchase during August at standard prices of \$125 for residents and \$750 for non-residents. FWP proposes a hunt format similar to the unlimited bighorn areas except no harvest quota would control the length of hunt and licenses would be valid for either-sex bighorn. Season dates would follow the general season format with an archery only season from the first Saturday in September through Sept. 14 and a general season opening Sept. 15 and running through the Sunday following Thanksgiving. Mandatory reporting of all harvest through established FWP reporting numbers will be necessary to track the harvest. Successful hunters harvesting a ram $\frac{3}{4}$ -curl or greater would be subject to a 7-year wait before applying for a bighorn license. By Commission rule, all rams of $\frac{1}{2}$ -curl or greater would have to be "plugged" with an identifying aluminum plug that goes in one of the horns to show that the animal was harvested legally.

An aggressive harvest strategy is needed to achieve full removal. We anticipate that it may take at least two years to remove the estimated 30-40 bighorns in the area. Any sheep remaining after aggressive public hunting would be removed by FWP by whatever means necessary, to include aerial gunning, and the meat donated to a local food bank.

Following confirmation that the bighorns are gone from the project area, the area will be restocked with approximately 50 healthy bighorns from one or more of Montana's source populations into one or more release sites previously accessed by FWP.

Public Involvement Process & Results

Formal public comment will run through 5 p.m., Thursday, July 2. Any final adoption will take place at the July 9 Commission meeting.

Alternatives and Analysis

A thorough analysis of the depopulation/restocking project was done in the EA and Decision Notice. Specific to alternatives and analysis for this proposal for licenses, if licenses are not issued the depopulation phase of the project could not be done as proposed.

Agency Recommendation & Rationale

FWP recommends that the Commission approve for public comment the proposed issuing of over-the-counter either-sex bighorn sheep licenses for HD 315, the Tendoy Mountains.

Proposed Motion

I move that the Commission approve for public comment the proposed issuing of over-the-counter either-sex bighorn sheep licenses for HD 315, the Tendoy Mountains.